



La Reata



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HISTORICAL HIGHLIGHTS OF SANTA CRUZ ISLAND

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Courtesy of Santa Barbara Historical Society

Prisoners' Harbor, Santa Cruz Island, in the late 19th century. The house at left is now gone, the ~~storage~~ *magazine* (storage shed) at right, remains.

Santa Cruz Island is the largest (96 square miles) of the four northern Channel Islands and is located 25 miles off the mainland coast of Santa Barbara. Its unique history and chain of ownership is an anomaly among California properties. Rather than the number of landowners increasing through land divisions with time, Santa Cruz Island remains owned by only two concerns and is relatively undeveloped by today's standards.

The first known inhabitants of Santa Cruz Island were the Chumash Indians and their ancestors. Radiocarbon dates show that the island was inhabited at least as long ago as seven thousand years.¹ As the Chumash left no written record, information about their island cultures is primarily gathered through archaeological examination.

Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo, probably the first European explorer to reach the coast of California, wrote of the Santa Barbara Channel in his 1542 journals. His is the first written account known to include mention of the island, although he called it by a different name. Continuing through the next two and one half centuries, at least four explorers, including Cermeño in 1595, Vizcaino in 1602, Portolá in 1769, and Vancouver in 1795, charted and wrote of Santa Cruz Island. Portolá's expedition is credited with the name "Isla de Santa Cruz," and Vancouver's charts finalized the names of all the northern Channel Islands. These early European explorers were more concerned with the California mainland and tended to pay little attention to the islands. Some did stop for wood and water in passing.²

In 1769, Santa Cruz Island (along with all of California) became vested in the King of Spain. During Spain's ownership, Chumash Indians continued to live on the island although decreasing in numbers due to exposure to European-introduced diseases until, in 1822, the last of the Chumash left Santa Cruz Island to live on the mainland.³ No Europeans are known to have settled on the island during the Spanish era, and presumably the island was "deserted" for many decades with perhaps the exception of a few seasonal fish camps scattered about the island's shores.

In 1821, after Mexico's long and successful revolt against Spain, California became part of the new Republic of Mexico. On July 20, 1838, the President of Mexico directed the Governor of California, Juan Bautista Alvarado, to grant lands to Mexican citizens who had performed various patriotic services. On May 22, 1839, Governor Alvarado conveyed the Island of Santa Cruz to Captain Andres Castillero. Specified in the grant was the island's description "... in extent of eleven

square leagues and no more, and has for its boundaries the water's edge."⁴ With this grant, Castillero became the first private owner of Santa Cruz Island, and he held that status for 18 years (1839-1857).

Soon after California was admitted to statehood in 1850, the United States Government appointed a Board of Land Commissioners to settle civil questions of California land ownership. Title to all land previously granted by the Spanish and Mexican governments during their rule in the newly formed State of California had to be proved by the owner before the Land Commission, according to United States law. In the case of Santa Cruz Island, on April 13, 1852, Andres Castillero filed his petition to secure confirmation of his title. His petition was repeatedly challenged and he was kept in court for twelve years. On November 7, 1864, the final necessary document was recorded by the United States Supreme Court, which confirmed Castillero's title as sole owner of Santa Cruz Island. In the meantime, however, Castillero had sold his interest in the island!



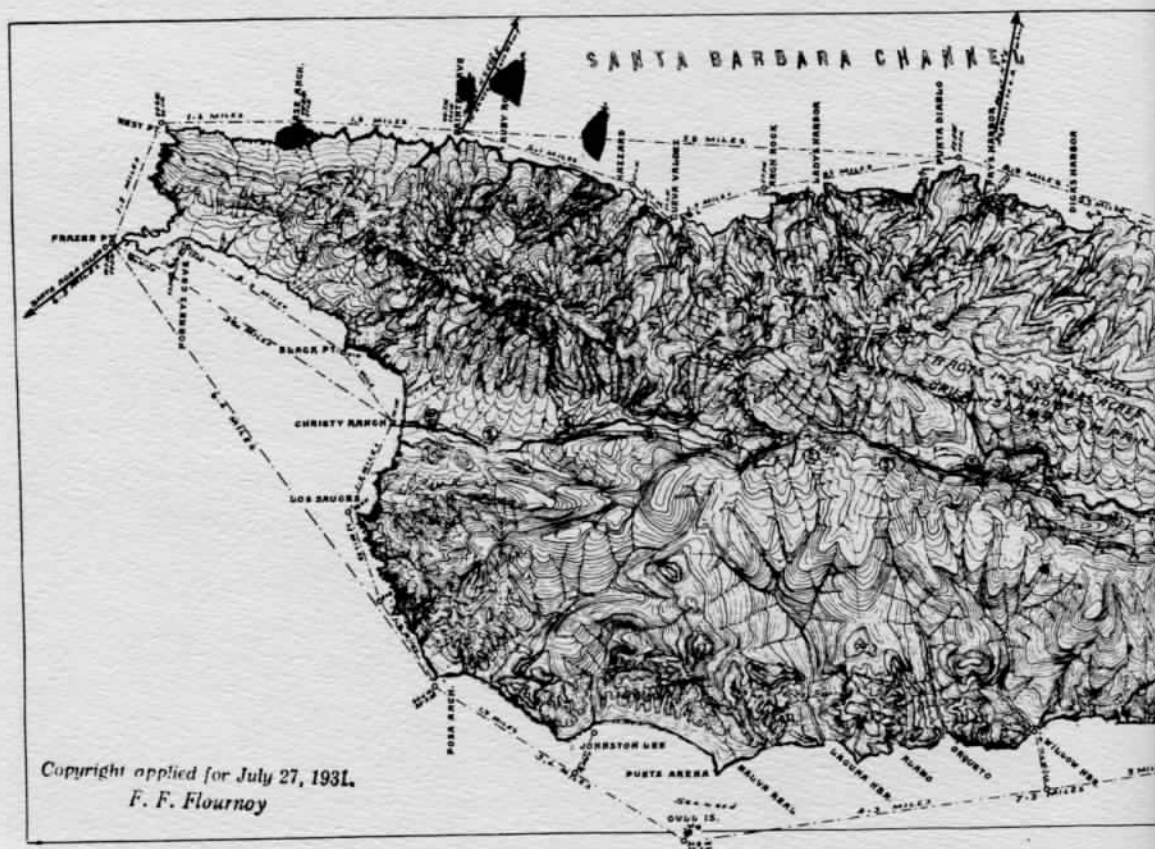
Main Ranch, Central Valley, Santa Cruz Island, in the early 20th century.

Courtesy of Santa Barbara Historical Society

During the latter part of Castellero's ownership of Santa Cruz Island, Dr. James B. Shaw, an English physician residing in Santa Barbara, supervised the island. He is thought to have introduced to the island the French Merino sheep and perhaps the ancestors of the now feral pigs. During Shaw's management, the first known ranch house was built in the island's Central Valley in 1855.⁵ After Castellero sold the island in 1857 to William Barron of Barron, Forbes & Company of San Francisco, Shaw continued to supervise the island for an additional twelve years.

Before Barron's 1869 sale, very little

had been done in the way of ranching development. Development began under the ownership of the Santa Cruz Island Company — its president and most active shareholder being a Frenchman from San Francisco named Justinian Caire. Caire had worked for Barron in San Francisco and knew something of the island's background. Within the course of twelve years, Caire bought out his nine partners in the corporation and became the sole owner of Santa Cruz Island by 1880. In that same year he paid his first visit to the island to survey his holdings and pursue the planning of what was to become one of the most prosperous, well-managed and beautiful ranches and vineyards in the entire state.

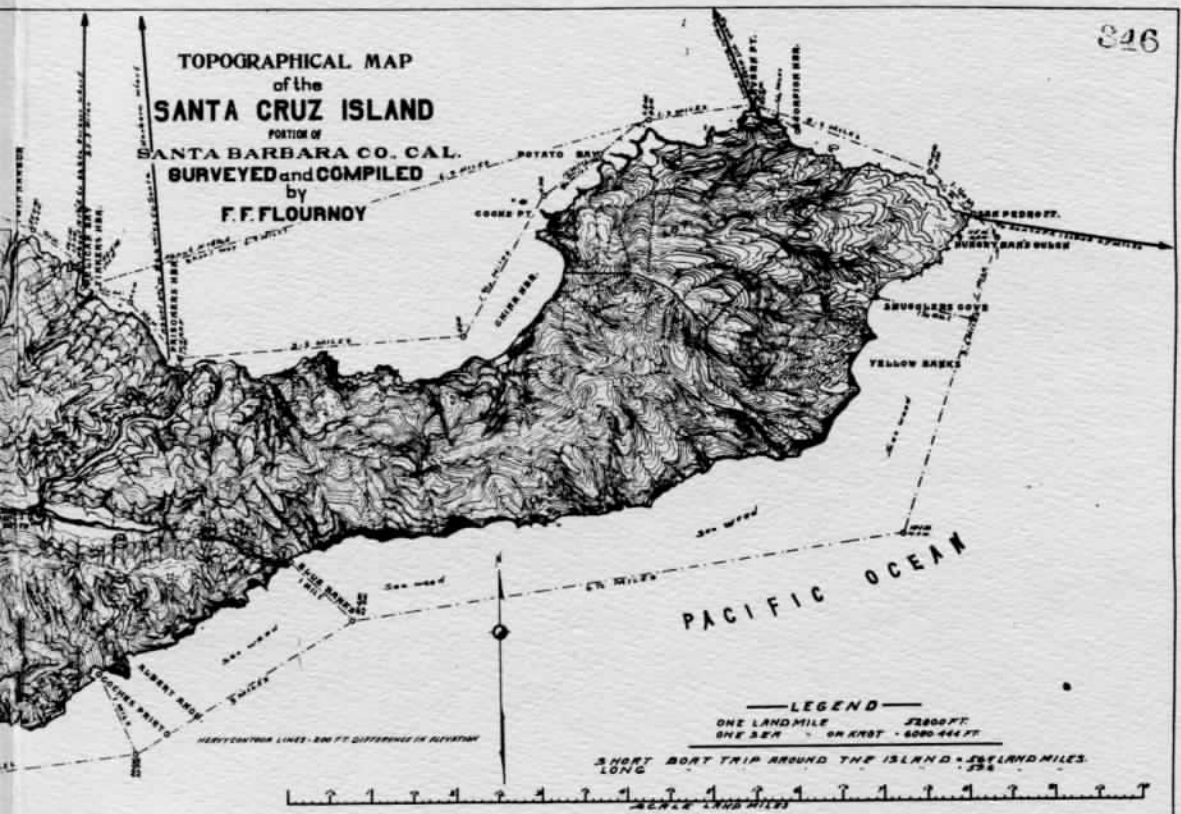


hall, blacksmith shop and saddle shop were constructed. Wherever possible, native island materials were used. Kilns were built for the manufacture of bricks and limestone mortar. Stones were quarried and cut to shape on the island. A resident blacksmith forged wrought iron fittings, railings and hinges used on many of the buildings. Full-time employees included masons, a wagon maker, carpenters, painters, team drivers, dairymen a butcher, vintners, grape-pickers, sheep-shearers, and a sea captain and sailors to run the Santa Cruz Island Company's 60-foot schooner.

The island was a very efficient operation and almost entirely a self-contained one. Flour, sugar and coffee were among the few staples which were required from the mainland. Temporary extra labor was brought to the island from Santa Barbara during sheep-shearing and grape-picking time. The wine which was made was

shipped in bulk in kegs to San Francisco where it was bottled. (No known bottle of Santa Cruz Island wine exists today.) A vast number of acres of oat hay and alfalfa were cultivated to keep the draft horses fed. All of the work on the island's 96 square miles was done on horseback or with the aid of wagons. Justinian Caire's masterly plan for the island is unequalled.

In December, 1897, Justinian Caire died, having transferred all of the stock in the Santa Cruz Island Company to his beloved wife, Albina.⁶ Extensive litigation within the Caire family followed, until, in 1925, the island was partitioned. The easterly 6600 acres remained with the Caire descendants who were the dissenters in the family litigation, and the westerly 54,000 acres were offered for sale. This 9/10 of Santa Cruz Island remained on the market as a "white elephant" until 1937 when Edwin L. Stanton purchased it.





Coreopsis gigantea, Valley Anchorage.

Marla Daily, 1983

For the first two years of his ownership, Edwin Stanton tried to revive and improve the sheep business. It was a difficult task because the sheep had become accustomed to life in the wild and would not cooperate with round-up and shearing efforts. Emphasis was then switched to cattle, and polled Herefords were introduced. They remain the mainstay of the island's ranching operation today.

Edwin Stanton died in 1963 and management of the Santa Cruz Island Company passed to his son Carey in 1973. The island continues to be operated in much the same manner as a 19th century California ranch was. It offers a very special window into the past, with a 20th century emphasis being placed on preservation and ecology. In the year 2008, the Santa Cruz Island Company holdings will pass to The Nature Conservancy, an organization dedicated to land preservation. The eastern tip of Santa Cruz Island, which remains in the ownership of Caire family descendants, is slated to become a part of our National Park System at an unknown future date.

NOTES

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¹ Glasgow, M.A., 1980. "Recent Developments in the Archaeology of the Channel Islands" in D. M. Power, ed., *The California Islands: Proceedings of a Multidisciplinary Symposium*. Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History, pp. 79-99. Glasgow lists 7140±210 radiocarbon year B.P. for a sample taken from Punta Arena, Santa Cruz Island.

² Dana, Richard Henry, (1964). *Two Years Before the Mast*. Ward Ritchie Press, Los Angeles.

³ Johnson, John, 1982. "An Ethnohistoric Study of the Island Chumash." Unpublished Masters Thesis, University of California at Santa Barbara, p. 195. Johnson lists baptismal records of Chumash Indians from Santa Cruz Island in 1822.

⁴ 21 March 1897 (Patent Date). "Transcript of the Proceedings in Case No. 176. *Andres Castillero, Claimant, vs. The United States, Defendant*, for the Island of Santa Cruz.

⁵ Stenzel, Franz, 1975. *James Madison Alden, Yankee Artist on the Pacific Coast, 1854-1860*. Amon Carter Museum, Ft. Worth, Texas, page 50, plate 15, "Rancho and Valley Santa Cruz Island, California, 1855" watercolor 7" x 10 1/2". This is the earliest known view of Santa Cruz Island. It shows a man on horseback, some haystacks and fowl, establishing agriculture and animal husbandry on the island at least as early as 1855.

⁶ Caire, Helen, 1982. "A Brief History of Santa Cruz Island from 1869-1937" in *Ventura Historical Society Quarterly*, Vol. 27, No. 4, Summer 1982, pp. 1-33.



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Wineries as seen from Chapel, Main Ranch.



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Santa Cruz Island Chapel, built 1890.